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A Meeting of the Descendants
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A MEETING OF THE DESCENDANTS OF EBENEZER AND MARY (HOWARD) TAFT, AT THE CHESTNUT HILL MEETING-HOUSE IN BLACKSTONE, MASS., TUESDAY, AUGUST 11, 1891, WITH THE ADDRESS OF REV. CARLTON A. STAPLES, AND OTHER PROCEEDINGS ON THAT OCCASION.

A MEETING OF THE DESCENDANTS OF EBENEZER AND MARY (HOWARD) TAFT, AT THE CHESTNUT HILL MEETING-HOUSE IN BLACKSTONE, MASS., TUESDAY, AUGUST 11, 1891, WITH THE ADDRESS OF REV. CARLTON A. STAPLES, AND OTHER PROCEEDINGS ON THAT OCCASION.

Printed by vote of those present.

The following circular was sent to the descendants whose places of residence were known: —

The descendants of Ebenezer and Mary (Howard) Taft will hold a reunion at the Chestnut Hill Meeting-house on Tuesday, August 11, commencing at 10.30 A.M.

There will be an address, with brief speeches, singing and music, in the church, after which dinner will be served under a tent in the yard or in a grove near by.

It is proposed that the dinner shall be in the form of a basket picnic, each family bringing their own provisions and spreading them upon a common table. Tea and coffee will be provided for all by the committee in charge. No admission fee will be charged, as only a very small expense will be incurred, which can be made up by voluntary contribution.

A cordial invitation is given to all the grandchildren and great-grandchildren and other descendants of our common ancestors to attend the meeting and join in the services. A committee has been appointed to make all necessary arrangements; and it is earnestly desired that every descendant, from the oldest to the youngest, may be present to honor the memory of Ebenezer and Mary Taft and their twelve children.

Putnam W. Taft, *Mendon*.
Willis Taft, *East Blackstone*.
Carlton A. Staples, *Lexington*.
Austin A. Fletcher, *Franklin*.

GEO. H. ELLIS, PRINTER, 141 FRANKLIN ST., BOSTON.

PROCEEDINGS.

The meeting was held at the time and place announced, and the proceedings were according to the following programme: —

READING OF THE SCRIPTURES.

HYMN. *Tune,* "Naomi."

So heaven is gathering, one by one,
In its capacious breast,
All that is pure and permanent
And beautiful and blest.

The family is scattered yet,
Though of one home and heart,—
Part militant in earthly gloom,
In heavenly glory part.

But who can speak the rapture when
The number is complete,
And all the children sundered now
Around one Father meet?

One fold, one Shepherd, one employ,
One everlasting home,—
Our Father's house, from whose dear rest
No wanderer e'er shall roam.

PRAYER.

ADDRESS OF WELCOME BY PUTNAM W. TAFT.

MUSIC.

ADDRESS BY REV. C. A. STAPLES.

HYMN. *Tune*, "Hebron."

How blest the sacred tie that binds
In union sweet according minds!
How swift the heavenly course they run,
Whose hearts and faith and hopes are one!

To each the soul of each how dear!
What jealous love, what holy fear!
How doth the generous flame within
Refine from earth and cleanse from sin!

In glad accord they seek the place
Where God reveals his gracious face.
How high, how strong, their raptures swell,
There's none but kindred souls can tell.

Nor shall the glowing flame expire
When droops at length frail nature's fire;
For they shall meet in realms above,—
A heaven of joy, because of love.

ADDRESSES BY VARIOUS SPEAKERS.

The day proved to be hot and sultry, but this did not prevent a large attendance of the relatives and friends, some of whom came a distance of twelve or fifteen miles to attend the meeting. All but two of the children of Ebenezer and Mary Taft having descendants now living were represented by their children or grandchildren, and some of them by large numbers. Among these were James and Elias Taft of Holliston, grandsons, the former ninety years of age, the latter eighty-eight years, who had ridden twelve miles that morning to be present. Their younger brother, Nelson Taft of Woonsocket, eighty-five years of age, was prevented from attending by sickness. Hon. Jared Benson of Anoka, Minn., a grandson, was unable to attend; but a letter expressing his hearty sympathy with the occasion and his regret not to be present was read to the meeting. An orchestra, conducted by Mr. Stephen Legg, discoursed inspiring music; and a choir of Chestnut Hill singers (always noted for spirited psalmody singing) led the congre-

gation with the hymns. After the reading of the Scriptures and prayer by Rev. C. A. Staples, the president of the day, Putnam W. Taft, made a cordial address of welcome, and gave some pleasant reminiscences of Grandfather and Grandmother Taft, and of Aunt Polly Hayward, whom he greatly respected and loved. Then came the address, which occupied about one hour, and was listened to attentively by the kindred and the people of the neighborhood, some of whom well remembered Ebenezer and Mary Taft.

ADDRESS.

Kinsmen and Friends,— We have gathered in this venerable house, consecrated by the worship of many generations, to commemorate the lives of our common ancestors, Ebenezer and Mary (Howard) Taft. Both were born within a few miles of this place, in what was then the old town of Mendon. After their marriage they always lived in this vicinity, and here their twelve children were born and grew up to manhood and womanhood. In this house was their place of worship, and here their mortal part was consigned to its kindred earth. All their children lived to years of adult age. All save one married and remained until their death within the limits of the town. And no less than nine of the twelve were buried in this ancient abode of the dead.

No place, therefore, is so closely associated with their memory and that of their children as this old meeting-house, and "God's acre" adjoining it. And it seems especially fitting that we, their descendants, should gather here to call to mind their lives, visit their graves, enjoy a few hours of social fellowship, and be drawn closer together by the ties of a common kinship.

Grandfather Ebenezer Taft was born in 1758, the son of Ebenezer Taft of Northbridge and Bethiah Fletcher of Mendon. Of his father little is known, and the son appears to have been left in his early years to the sole care

of his mother. She was the daughter of Abraham Fletcher of Concord, who married Bethiah Aldrich of Mendon in 1731, and came here to live. Her brother, Asa Fletcher, married Thankful Staples, and lived on the place in Mendon known as the Abel Aldrich farm on the south side of Little Pond. She is remembered as a woman of energy and decision, active, thoughtful, of deep religious feelings, a strict Calvinist in theology, and a constant attendant upon the Sunday worship here as long as she was able to come. She lived with her son, after he possessed a home of his own, and was treated by him with kindness and respect. Her grandchildren, our fathers and mothers, used to speak of her quaint and striking appearance on Sunday morning, when, wearing a red cloak, she started off on foot for the meeting-house, two miles distant, or came trudging home after the services were over. Such is the slight knowledge we have of the mother of Ebenezer Taft. She is buried here in the final resting-place of a large number of her descendants.

Grandfather, her only child, was born to a humble and hard lot. Of his early life we have but the scantiest knowledge. "Bound out," as it was called, when a mere lad of ten or twelve years, to Captain Holden of Mendon, he probably remained with him until the age of seventeen. They were poor people, living on a small farm in a close and pinched way. Captain Holden, I believe, had seen service in the French and Indian War, and, when grandfather lived in the family, was old and feeble. Probably the chief work of the farm was laid upon this boy. Certain it is that he had a severe discipline in his youth while living with this man,— hard work, poor clothing, scanty fare, harsh words, if not cruel blows, the remembrance of which was painful to him as long as he lived. The wife seems to have been more merciless and exacting than her husband, and did much to make his life miserable.

Of schooling he had but little, save that of steady toil

and stern self-denial. If he attended school at all, it was only for a brief period. Whatever education he possessed was gained from his intercourse with men and by his persistent struggle to improve his condition. In after years he transacted considerable business in buying and selling land and in the trading of a prosperous farmer. But beyond his strict business habits we know nothing of his intellectual attainments.

At the beginning of the War of the Revolution Ebenezer Taft was not far from seventeen years of age possibly: he lacked a few months of it. In 1775 Mendon had three companies of minute men. One of these, if not all, that of Captain Joseph Daniels, marched for Boston on receiving news of the battle of Lexington. They appear to have reached Roxbury on the same day, April 19, and rendered some service in shutting the British up in Boston. The pay-rolls of this company are preserved at the State House, but grandfather's name is not on them. It may have been upon those of some other company. If there were three full companies at that time in Mendon, they must have contained many men of no greater age than he. However this may have been, the muster-rolls show that Ebenezer Taft of Mendon served in four different campaigns. First, in 1777, for two months in Rhode Island, Captain Isaac Martin's Company, Colonel Joseph Whitney's Regiment. Second, in Captain Peter Penniman's Company, Colonel Job Cushing's Regiment, in the same year. This was in the Northern army, operating against Burgoyne, where he served from the 17th of August to the 29th of November, during those desperate battles which preceded the surrender of the invading army in October, 1777. Probably, he returned to Boston with the guard of the prisoners, where his term of enlistment expired. Third, in the following year, 1778, he served for six weeks in Captain Baker's Company, Colonel Haws's Regiment, in Rhode Island. Fourth, in July, 1780, he enlisted in Captain Benjamin Reed's Com-

pany, Colonel Nathan Tyler's Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant John Benson, on the alarm in Rhode Island. Thus it appears from these brief memoranda of the pay-rolls that he was in the service of his country portions of the time during the years 1777, 1778, and 1780. What his experiences were, or precisely where his service was rendered, I am unable to tell. Asking Uncle Millens Taft, his son, if he knew anything about grandfather's army life, he recalled hearing him talk with some of his old comrades who came to visit him and live over again the scenes through which they had passed. He remembered how they laughed and joked with him about losing his fiddle when in New York, probably on the campaign against Burgoyne. This seems to show that he may have had some musical talent, and carried it with him to enliven the monotony of camp life. Or, which is the more probable, he may have confiscated it as contraband of war, the property of some Tory! Uncle Millens also remembered the visits of Rev. Preserved Smith, pastor of the church in Mendon, who preached a portion of the time in this meeting-house, then belonging to the South Parish. He had been a soldier in the army of the Revolution. After the war he entered Brown University, where he graduated and then prepared for the ministry. When returning to his home after preaching at Chestnut Hill, he sometimes stopped for supper, when he and grandfather told their war stories and had a jovial time together. Being then a boy of only six or eight years, he could recall little of what was said.

But, before going farther, let us take a look at Grandmother Taft. Her maiden name was Mary Howard, or, more properly, Hayward, the eldest daughter of Benjamin and Elizabeth (Thayer) Howard, a descendant in the fifth generation of Samuel Hayward, who settled in Mendon about 1680, on the place known as the Zolomon Wood farm, from whom most of the Haywards and Howards of

this vicinity are descended. Why the name Hayward should have been changed to Howard with some of his descendants it is difficult to understand. But certain it is that Benjamin Hayward, the youngest son of Samuel, was the grandfather of Benjamin Howard, the father of Mary, the wife of Ebenezer Taft. She was born Oct. 10, 1760, in a house then standing on the old Dam Swamp road, a little north of the bridge over Hop Brook, on the way from Blackstone to Mendon. The cellar-hole of the house may still be seen in the woods there, but the house must have disappeared nearly a century ago. I well remember the old apple-trees standing near the pile of stones that marked the site. A more lonely spot can hardly be imagined. Not a house was to be seen from it in grandmother's childhood, and there was only a clearing of a few acres around it. A rough, winding, hilly road ran by it, on which a wagon or an ox-team or even a solitary horseman or footman was seldom seen, with the Dam Swamp stretching far and wide in the rear (a name said to have been given it by a profane man once lost in its tangled mazes), and not a neighbor for a long distance on either side. Such was the lonely place where Mary Howard was born in the first year of the reign of George III.

Where she went to school, or that she ever went to school, I am unable to say. The school district to which she belonged was that now known as Albeville; and the school was two miles away, if school there was at that time. I remember hearing her tell of going to the Sunday meeting at Mendon, when a girl, and carrying her shoes in her hand until she came in sight of the meeting-house, when she sat down and put them on; and so on her return home, once out of sight of the church, they were taken off, and carried, showing the extreme care used not to deface or wear out those costly articles, made to last for years. I also remember hearing her describe that strange phenomenon known in New England as "the dark day." It was in

May, 1780, when, bringing a pail of water from the spring, she noticed the singular appearance of the peach blossoms, unlike anything she had ever seen before. The darkness began to be observed about ten o'clock in the morning, and increased until people were unable to continue their work or find their way along the roads and through the fields. Candles were lighted in the house to see to cook the dinner, the birds and fowls went to roost, people were heard shouting for help who had lost their way. Through the day and night the deep darkness continued. Many were greatly alarmed, believing that the end of the world was about to come. Such were some of the reminiscences of the dark day which grandmother used to relate while the children listened in breathless awe to her story.

Ebenezer Taft and Mary Howard were married March 19, 1779, he being then twenty-one years of age and she nineteen. Where they began housekeeping, or what they had to begin housekeeping on, we know not. It may be fairly questioned if they possessed between them the value of fifty dollars. But they were young, strong, and brave, inured to hardship, used to manual labor, skilled in economy, and knew how to make the most of their means and opportunities. Patiently they toiled, and carefully saved, to make themselves a home, and provide it with such comforts as were within their reach. No doubt it was a very humble home, with scanty furnishings for the table, the wardrobe, and the rooms; but what they had was honestly earned and heartily enjoyed. Trusting in God and in each other, by hard work and frugal habits they attained a moderate prosperity.

For several years grandfather lived on rented farms,— for some time, I believe, on that known as the Quisset place. The cellar-hole of the old house which they occupied may be seen on the road leading into the Dam Swamp woods, a little west of the Solomon Pratt house. Afterward he lived on the Samuel Verry farm, and still later he bought

the Holbrook farm, where many years of their life were passed and where several of their children were born. At that time this was a large and productive place, where a dairy of ten cows was kept and much grain and young stock were raised. The house in which they lived is still standing, but one wonders how it could ever have sheltered a family of such ample dimensions as grandfather's. Subsequently this farm was exchanged for the Darling place adjoining it, now the Blackstone town farm. At this time the children had grown up, and some had gone from the paternal hive to make homes of their own. Here the remaining years of grandfather's life were passed; and here he died, Oct. 3, 1836, at the age of seventy-eight years.

Grandmother survived him nearly twelve years, dying at the home of her son, Uncle Millens, in Blackstone, Aug. 15, 1848. They lived together fifty-seven years, and were gathered to their fathers in a good old age, respected by their neighbors and friends for simplicity, uprightness, and fidelity of character. We, their descendants, in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth generations, gladly recall their sterling virtues and honor their memory.

Let us recall some of the stern realities encountered in their married life. As we have seen, they began with but a small portion of worldly goods. Twelve children were born to them in the first twenty-five years. During this time they lived mainly on rented farms, but had managed so prudently as to secure a home of their own and support their large and steadily increasing family. Probably some indebtedness remained upon it; but the amount was not large, and they were decreasing it from year to year. Imagine what the annual expenditure must have been for food, clothing, and shoeing in such a family! Much of the clothing was manufactured in the house from flax and wool raised on the farm, spun, wove, dyed, and made into garments largely by grandmother's tireless hands. Nearly everything consumed by the family came from the fields

and flocks of the farm. The shoes were made in the house at the annual visit of the travelling cobbler. The little money income came from the butter and cheese of the dairy and the beef and pork raised on the farm and transported to Boston or Providence by team to market. Think of the burdens which grandmother must have borne from early morning till late at night, year after year through half a century! the wise planning and hard working outdoors and indoors to get the utmost from the little they had and make both ends meet, and with seven daughters to be married! Their way must have been that of the old story: —

"Said the husband to his wife one day,
'We have scarce enough to eat:
And, if things go on in this bad way,
We can't make both ends meet.'
The wife replied, in words discreet,
'We are not so badly fed.
If we can't make but one end meat,
We'll make the other end bread.'"

But there seems to have been no difficulty in marrying off those daughters, girls well prepared for helpmeets to men having their way to make in the world, so efficient in ways to render a family comfortable and promote a husband's prosperity.

I am disposed to regard grandmother as "the main spoke in the wheel" of that large family, with its endless cares and perplexities. She was a firm, resolute, patient, caretaking woman, facing her duties bravely, without murmuring, accepting cheerfully the conditions of her lot, and striving to make the best of it. She had a genius for turning off work easily and rapidly, had great physical vigor and power of endurance, and a genial and happy spirit. Grandfather was a man who had speculation in his eye, and was always looking forward to a more prosperous time coming. He believed that a vast material development for the country was close at hand, with an immense advance in the

value of land. Accordingly, he trimmed his sails to catch the breeze that was to bear him on to golden fortunes. He bought large tracts of land, and held them for the expected rise, borrowing money to meet his purchases. Among his papers, now yellow and crumpled with age, are notes and mortgages, all duly paid, to Boston and Worcester banks, to Harvard College, and to noted money-lenders of his day. It is said that he never failed to meet an obligation punctually, when it became due. He had a high sense of honor, and his credit was of the best in business affairs. His word was always kept to the letter. Men regarded it "as good as his bond," and hence he had no difficulty in borrowing money whenever it was to be had. Surely, it was an honorable reputation; but it involved dangerous temptations. Thus he went on buying and borrowing for years, confidently expecting the rising tide that was to bring a great prosperity. Could he have held on until the building up of these large villages along the valley of the Blackstone, his timber and wood might have made him a rich man. But he was in advance of the times; and so his golden dreams came to naught, though he maintained his credit to the last, and paid dollar for dollar. A man of large hopefulness, forward-looking, enterprising and ambitious, yet honest and faithful in his relations with his fellow-men. He was of a nervous temperament, of a slender frame, quick in motion, active, reserved and stern in manner, thoughtful and grave. Subject to attacks of severe sickness, he would be suffering acute pain one hour, and be up and about his business the next,—apparently near to death to-day, but wide awake and busy to-morrow, always pressing on toward some better thing to come. Is it not surprising that in circumstances so adverse, a lot so cramped and lowly, he should have borne himself so well, won so good a name, and left so bright a memory? No doubt it was largely due to that brave, patient, hard-working wife, who conducted household affairs so wisely, saved

every cent that could be saved to sustain his credit with the money-lenders, and strengthened him in the prosecution of his schemes. Well may we say of her in the words of the Scriptures: "The heart of her husband trusteth in her. She doeth him good all the days of her life, and her children rise up and call her blessed." In the latter years of his life grandfather gave up his affairs to his youngest son, Uncle Millens, and lived in quiet and comfort in a portion of the house on the Darling place. He was able to do little work, being subject to frequent and distressing sickness. Near the close of life he received a pension for his service in the War of the Revolution, which was continued to grandmother after his death. When he had gone, it was thought she would give up housekeeping and live with uncle; but this she was unwilling to do. "I mean to have a table of my own," she used to say, "to which I can welcome my children and grandchildren"; and right hearty was the welcome which she gave them, and bright and cheery was her talk. When above eighty years of age, she rode in an open wagon with her son to visit relatives in New Hampshire, a journey of two hundred miles, which she bore without serious fatigue. I well remember her visits to our home, her interest in her grandchildren and in all that was going on in society. Below medium height, robust in form, of fair complexion and pleasant voice, she was the picture of cheerfulness, good nature, and contentment. Hers was a serene and sunny old age, after the heavy burdens of earlier years were laid down; and she passed on to join the great company of her relatives and friends in hope and peace.

In conclusion, let us notice briefly the five sons and seven daughters of Ebenezer and Mary Taft. We may be certain that they were not allowed to grow up without knowing how to earn an honest living, the indispensable part of an education. No drones were permitted in that busy hive. The boys were early trained to do the work of the farm. Very

largely, I think, it was laid upon their young shoulders. The ploughing and planting, the haying and reaping, the threshing and harvesting, the care of cattle, the cutting of timber and wood,— everything connected with farm work was required of them as soon as they were able to do it. The girls were thoroughly instructed and trained in all the mysteries of cooking and dairying, spinning and weaving, the making of their own and their brothers' clothes, the care of the sick and the tending of babies,— in short, everything required of efficient housekeepers, wives, and mothers. And, lest there should be any lack of work in the home, before they were old enough to wash and scrub and sew, they were taught to braid straw, with a fixed number of yards per day as their stint. I well remember hearing my mother tell of riding alone on horseback from their house to the Penniman store in South Milford, carrying the braid of the family and exchanging it there for such articles as the household required. She went by the lonely road through the Dam Swamp woods, near an Indian wigwam and over the Inman Hill, passing scarcely a house on the way,— a journey of five or six miles,— to dispose of straw braid at fifty or seventy-five cents a hundred yards, and be paid in goods on which the storekeeper doubtless made a profit of one hundred per cent. or more. By such work, on such pay, the girls bought their Sunday dresses and bonnets, their wedding finery, and their "setting out" for housekeeping.

Enos, the oldest of these children, was born Dec. 8, 1779, and died Dec. 29, 1813, at the early age of thirty-four. Often have I heard the pathetic story of his sickness and death. He was living with his wife and five young children on the place known as the Scammel Aldrich farm; and in his last sickness, feeling that his life was fast ebbing away, he wanted to be taken to his father's house to die. If only he could be carried back to the old home, he would die in peace. Unable to bear the jolting of a wagon, a litter was prepared; and he was borne to his childhood's

home, a distance of four miles, and there breathed his last, in the loving care of his mother. The circumstances of his death, the five little children left to the care of the widowed mother with little means of support, the funeral when the minister preached from the text, "Set thy house in order, for thou shalt surely die," made a deep impression upon the family. The youngest of his brothers, Uncle Millens, then a lad of eight years, repeated the text to me just before his own death, seventy-five years afterwards. Uncle Enos's four sons, James, Elias, Nelson, and Elijah, grew up to be worthy and useful men. The first three still survive in a good old age. His daughter, Sylvia, the wife of Jarvis Cook, died after four years of married life. The descendants of Enos Taft, the living and the dead, including the first, second, third, and fourth generations, number seventy-five, being more numerous than those of any other of grandfather's children.

Betsy, the eldest daughter, was born June 11, 1781, and died Sept. 21, 1814, which marks the date of "the great blow," as it used to be called: we should call it the great cyclone. Some of the traces of it may be seen in this vicinity after the lapse of more than seventy-five years. Passing a certain house, not far from this place, on one occasion with my mother, she said, "Here my sister Betsy died; and her body lay here during that awful gale, when we feared the house might be blown away at any moment." She married Ezra Allen, who, it is supposed, was lost at sea, leaving her with three young children, Ezra, Willis, and Lucinda. Aunt Betsy supported her little family by braiding straw, with such assistance as her father and friends gave her; but the battle of life was too hard for her strength, and after a few years she died, at the age of thirty-three years. The daughter passed away before her mother, and the sons were left to make their way as best they could in the world. Ezra, through a hard and trying experience, became a man of great force and persistence of

character. He was a successful manufacturer in Hadley for many years, and afterward a merchant in Boston, where he died in 1881. Several of his children and grandchildren are living in the city and in the vicinity. Willis, when last heard of, was living in Detroit. The descendants of Betsy Taft Allen number thirty-two.

Putnam, the third child, was born Aug. 5, 1783, and died February, 1810, at the age of twenty-seven. He was a teacher in the public schools of Mendon, and won distinction in that profession. Long after his death he was remembered by those who had been his pupils with respect and affection. He was married, and left one child, the late Putnam W. Taft of Worcester, a man of note in political and social life. He had no children, and consequently this line became extinct at his death. Uncle Putnam's widow married for a second husband Ephraim Lee of Mendon, and the late Mrs. Susan (Lee) Huston of Providence was their daughter. Out of her share in the estate of her half-brother, she founded the Taft Public Library in Mendon, in fulfilment of his expressed purpose to do something of the kind for the benefit of his native town. How it would have cheered the last days of Uncle Putnam, could he have known that the boy he was leaving behind would be the means of establishing an institution of such usefulness, and perpetuating his name to remote generations!

Aunt Polly comes next in the list of children, born June 20, 1785, and died August, 1865, at the age of eighty years. How well her strong, sweet face, her gentle voice, her kind, motherly ways are remembered by all her nephews and nieces! She married Elijah Haywood of Mendon. Two sons, Rufus and Enos, and one daughter, Betsy, were born to them. Rufus lived and died in this town, leaving two children. He was a man of ability and worth, serving the town in many of its offices, and at one time a representative in the legislature of the State. Enos, now nearly eighty years of age, lives in Newport, where his children

and grandchildren also reside. The daughter married Darius Bennett, for many years the postmaster of Blackstone, but recently deceased. They had no children. Aunt Polly's descendants, of whom there are four generations, numbered thirty-one.

Sally Taft, grandfather's fifth child, was born Oct. 21, 1788, and died March, 1855, in her sixty-seventh year. She married Jared Benson, Esq., who was born and always lived near this spot, the grandson, I think, of Benoni Benson, the first settler of Chestnut Hill. Uncle Jared is intimately associated in my mind with this meeting-house. The first time I came here was at the funeral of my eldest brother, Esbon, a lad of thirteen, drowned while bathing in Mendon Pond, fifty-seven years ago on the 6th of last July. Uncle Benson's erect and stalwart form and sympathetic face much impressed me as he received the sorrowing train here at the door of the house, and gave us a cup of cold water in the grateful shade. A sober, thoughtful, kindly man, a prosperous farmer and good business manager, he was much intrusted with town affairs, moderator of town meetings, selectman, representative to the General Court, executor of wills and guardian of orphan children. He had great interest in church music, and often led the singing here with his bass-viol, making the old house resound with the praises of the Lord. In his home, a genial, story-telling man, fond of merry jokes and laughter, and holding in memory a fund of interesting incidents and traditions. Four sons were born to them. The two elder, Sullivan and Putnam, young men of remarkable promise, died in early manhood, when just beginning to fulfil the high expectations of their friends. Jared soon after his marriage removed to Minnesota, then a sparsely settled State, and became one of the early inhabitants of Anoka, a flourishing town about thirty miles north of St. Paul. He has been prominent in State and national politics, and has filled many responsible positions in the gift of the people, besides

that of speaker of the house in the State legislature. Sylvanus was a man of active and energetic spirit in business and in town affairs, postmaster of Blackstone, selectman during the war, and most active in filling the town's quota of soldiers. He removed to Illinois in the last years of his life, where he died, leaving a widow and several children, one by his second marriage, now also married and living in Portland, Me. The descendants of Aunt Sally number twenty.

Chloe Taft was born Nov. 7, 1790, and died May 14, 1824, in her thirty-fourth year. She married Nahor Fletcher, and became the mother of seven children. Two died in infancy; and five sons grew up to manhood, three of whom are still living. Her husband was a distant cousin; but none of her children, so far as I know, were underwitted, as cousins' children are sometimes said to be. She died from injuries received in putting out a fire accidentally started by one of the children in the cellar of the house. They were all young when she passed away, one a mere infant, leaving the large brood to the uncertain care of those who could but poorly fill the place of a devoted mother. And yet, under the hardships and privations of their lot, those five sons grew up to be industrious, temperate, frugal, and worthy men, successful above most of us in business affairs, and filling honorable places in society. Abraham, William, Harris, Charles, and Austin Fletcher are names of cousins endeared to us all. Aunt Chloe's descendants reach the goodly number of thirty.

Deborah Taft, born Feb. 20, 1792, died unmarried February, 1814, at the age of twenty-two years.

Leonard, the third son, was born on the eighteenth anniversary of the battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1794, and died in his seventy-ninth year, Oct. 25, 1872. How well we recall his sturdy form, his massive features, his grave manner, his stern voice, and yet genial and jovial spirit when

in his brightest mood! It was always pleasant to visit his home, and right merry were the cousin-gatherings there at Thanksgiving and Old Election. One of "the gentlest of gentle womankind," yet one of the most thoughtful and efficient of wives and mothers, presided over it, and delighted in the young people's frolic and fun. No sweeter, kindlier face haunts the chambers of memory than Aunt Martha's. No more bountiful and appetizing table than hers made glad our youthful hearts. No lot in all the circle of our kindred was lighted up by a more patient, loving, Christian spirit than hers. A life of tireless industry, of unceasing cares, of self-denying deeds, was made bright and happy by the hope and trust which filled her heart. Of that large band of brothers and sisters, four are with us here to-day; but the others, Eben, Hannah, and Leonard, have passed on. To my youthful fancy, Cousin Hannah was the brightest and most beautiful of girls. Married, at the early age of eighteen, to a worthy man, she seemed to have a bright future opening before her; but it was soon closed on earth by death. Two sons were left in their tender years. No braver soldier came out of the great conflict which saved the Union, scarred and crippled for life, than the late Lieutenant Edwin C. Gaskill, of the Veteran Corps of the United States army, her eldest son. Nor must I forget to speak of Cousin Leonard, often my companion, and always my faithful friend, one of the purest and noblest souls I have ever known: —

> "He, the young and true, who cherished
> Earnest longings for the strife,
> By the roadside fell and perished,
> Weary with the march of life."

It ill becomes this occasion to speak much of the living, but surely it is fitting that we should remember the dead. No brighter or more promising young life was sacrificed on the altar of the Union and of freedom than that of Anthon

C. Taft, the only son of Cousin Putnam and the grandson of Uncle Leonard and Aunt Martha. His loss at the beginning of his service in the army was a sore grief to many friends in whose hearts his memory is very precious. The descendants in this line number fifty. Among them there has been a worthy ambition for learning and usefulness. Probably they have more men and women well trained in the school and college, and doing good service in various ways, than any other of our families.

Uncle Ellis Taft, born May 20, 1796, died Aug. 15, 1851, in his fifty-sixth year, was the only one in this long list who had no children. His wife, Asenath Boyden, or "Aunt Seney," as we used to call her, was a woman of most lovable qualities, always cheerful, patient, and contented. No more happy couple was to be seen in our circle of kindred than they. None of my uncles were so attractive to me as Uncle Ellis. He kept his youthful spirits as long as he lived, entered into a boy's feelings and plans with peculiar zest, listening to his talk and telling him his best stories. How hard he worked on that rocky farm, how hopefully he planned, to stem the tide of adverse fortune and secure comfort and competence! Though it seemed to be always setting against him, the fact never soured his spirit or long chilled his good nature. And the dear soul that walked so lovingly by his side, clinging to him all the closer in the dark and stormy hours, until she closed his eyes in death, how calm and peaceful were her closing years, prolonged to almost a century! Humble and poor in worldly state, but, oh, how rich in the immortal treasures of faith, love, and goodness!

Phila Taft, my mother, was born Jan. 20, 1799, and died Feb. 17, 1885, having just entered upon her eighty-seventh year. She was married to Jason Staples in August, 1819; and seven children were born to them, four sons and three daughters, of whom five lived to adult years. Of her three sons who lived to manhood, all were in the Union army,

two as chaplains. Henry, the youngest, enlisted as a private in the First Wisconsin Cavalry, and was promoted to a lieutenancy in the regiment and served three years, the full term of his enlistment. He saw hard and trying service with General Sherman's army in the advance from Chattanooga to Atlanta, and in the desperate battles by which that rebel stronghold was captured. Though apparently in sound health when discharged from the service and for some years afterward, the effects of the exposure and hardship of his army life ultimately undermined his splendid constitution and brought on paralysis, from which he died after a long and distressing sickness. Of the other brother, prostrated by long and severe sickness while with his regiment, the Sixth Wisconsin, in Virginia, from which he never recovered, I may also be permitted to speak. He survived his brief term of service for three years, much of the time in pain and feebleness, dying in his early manhood, while pastor of the Second Unitarian Church in Brooklyn, at the age of thirty-three. Surely, it is no fond partiality that leads me to claim for him a remarkably brilliant mind, a noble ambition for learning and for usefulness, and a pure and lofty spirit; for such is the judgment often passed upon him by those best able to form a just opinion of his ability and character. It has been a great surprise and pleasure to learn, from those who came within the sphere of his influence, how strong, permanent, and far-reaching that influence has been. Of the many able and useful men among the descendants of Ebenezer and Mary Taft, their grandson, Nahor Augustus Staples, stands in the first rank. And a word of fond remembrance you will allow me to say of the sister who passed on many years since, leaving a large and loving circle of children and friends. The sprightly and beautiful girl, full of hope and gladness, the sunny-hearted, tender, sympathetic woman, the devoted wife and mother, caring for every one in the household but herself, cheerfully bearing great bur-

dens of work and responsibility for the happiness of others, — such was Caroline (Staples) Wood as I think of her now, calling to mind how sweetly and bravely she lived, toiled, and died: —

> "Though oft depressed and lonely,
> All my fears are laid aside,
> If I but remember only,
> Such as these have lived and died."

The descendants of Jason and Phila Taft Staples number forty-six.

There remain two others, of whom I gladly speak, the youngest of grandfather's great family, Aunt Nancy and Uncle Millens, peculiarly dear to each other, because, being the youngest, they grew up together.

Nancy Taft was born Aug. 14, 1801, and died Jan. 14, 1849, in her forty-eighth year. She married Elisha Hayward, and was the mother of eight children. I have heard others say that a more bright and beautiful group was not to be found among us. Two lovely girls, Sarah and Deborah, were cut off in the bloom of youth, when life was just opening into womanhood. Two worthy and noble young men, Warren and Sylvester, were taken in the hope and promise of early manhood. Nor can we forget the eldest daughter, Adeline (Hayward) Benson, called away in her twenty-fifth year, leaving a fond husband and infant son. The shafts of death fell thick and fast in that family, making wide gaps among them. The mother soon followed her daughters. I shall never forget standing at her bedside when she was passing into the great shadow, and hearing her speak of the beatific visions opening before her wondering soul. The scenes of earth were fast fading away, and the more glorious scenes of the immortal world rose clear and beautiful upon the eyes of the spirit. With the utmost confidence, she spoke of beholding her dear children at that moment waiting for her on the other side and beckoning her to come. Nor can I find it in my mind

to doubt the reality of her vision. In the calmest and clearest language, she described what she saw. That world which is invisible to our dull eyes was being silently unveiled to hers, and in her radiant face we beheld the light of the eternal morning just beginning to dawn. Uncle Elisha survived her a few years, when he joined the larger family beyond the grave. Eighteen descendants are to be counted in this line.

And now the last to come and the longest to stay concludes this record of grandfather's and grandmother's children. Millens Taft was born Jan. 25, 1804, and died June 6, 1890, in his eighty-seventh year. It is pleasant to recall the sweet face of his wife, Olive (Comstock) Taft. She had the same gentle, patient, loving spirit as her sister, Uncle Leonard's wife, one of the most cheerful and unselfish beings I have ever known. Returning from the old Quaker burying-ground where we had laid her body beside those of her children who had gone before, her husband said to me, "You could not speak too highly of her worth."

Uncle Millens was respected wherever known for integrity and purity of character, and implicitly trusted. At different times he filled almost every office in the gift of the people of this town, and he rendered much service to widows and orphans in the settlement of estates and the care of their property. He stood high in the community for sound judgment in business affairs, and was fairly successful in the management of his various enterprises. A genial, open-hearted, hospitable man, always glad to welcome us to his home, thoughtful and kind toward those of his kindred needing assistance in the struggle of life, he has left a memory that is fondly cherished in many hearts. His eldest son, Cousin Millens, was taken away in the prime of his manhood, leaving a large family to mourn the loss of an affectionate husband and father. Eliza was also taken in her opening womanhood, and is remembered

among us as a bright and promising girl. Of Cousin Olive (Taft) Wood, the youngest of this flock, it only needs that I should speak her name, so fresh and sweet is her memory here. She was truly a noble woman, with a genius for loving and being loved that won hosts of friends among all classes of people wherever she lived. The descendants of Uncle Millens and Aunt Olive number thirty-seven.

In summing up this long record, no doubt imperfect in some particulars, I have counted three hundred and forty-one children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren of Ebenezer and Mary Taft,—a vast multitude, indeed,—in these four generations from the parent stock, among whom many of the dead and of the living may be named who have acquitted themselves well in the battle of life and done good service for their country and mankind.

It may be thought that the picture here drawn is too brightly colored; that the virtues of our ancestors and kindred have been presented in too favorable a light, while their faults and failings have been ignored. But it could not well be otherwise. The bright and pleasant things in the lives of our friends we love to recall and remember: the disagreeable and unfortunate things we quickly forget, and the characters of those who have gone appear more perfect to us after Death has set his seal upon them. Besides, this picture is not drawn for cold and critical eyes, but for children and friends whose hearts are warm with pleasant memories of the departed whom they hope to meet and dwell with in the immortal world.

But, making due allowance for the partiality of friendship and love, still it may fairly be claimed that these kindred of ours are worthy of grateful remembrance; and if we, with our larger knowledge and brighter lot, acquit ourselves as faithfully, it will be well for us and those who shall fill our places in the generations to come.

After the conclusion of the address the chairman called upon his brother, Enos N. Taft, Esq., of New York City, who, with deep emotion, spoke of the pleasure which this meeting gave him, and the great satisfaction he had in renewing his acquaintance with so many of his kindred. He recalled cheering memories of his uncles, aunts, and cousins who have passed on, and expressed the hope that the address which gathered up so much information regarding our families might be printed, and so preserved for our descendants. The chairman then called upon Austin B. Fletcher, Esq., also of New York City, who spoke in earnest and feeling language of the value of such gatherings in keeping alive an interest in each other's welfare and preserving the memory of many worthy lives. He hoped that the address would be printed and a permanent organization be formed to hold annual meetings in this place.

An adjournment was then made to the spacious tent in the yard adjoining the church, where tables were spread for the large company, and loaded with a bountiful feast. More than a hundred of the kindred were seated at the tables, and with pleasant talk and story discussed the tempting viands. After visiting the graves of their kindred in the churchyard, the company reassembled in the meeting-house, where Mr. Ellis Hayward of Rockland, Conn., now for many years an honored teacher in that town, addressed the meeting, and in eloquent words recalled the memory of his Uncle Ellis and Aunt Seney. Others also spoke of their enjoyment of the happy occasion. Cousin Austin A. Fletcher, who had been deeply interested in the meeting, then moved that a permanent organization of the descendants be formed, and a committee appointed to arrange for a meeting next year at the same place. His motion met with universal approval, and arrangements were made accordingly.

But, alas! he who was so earnest in this matter, and had entered into it so heartily, will meet here with us no more.

Austin A. Fletcher passed away, after a brief illness, at his home in Franklin, Oct. 29, 1891, much respected and honored by the town.

The meeting closed with singing the following beautiful hymn to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne": —

It singeth low in every heart,
We hear it each and all,—
A song of those who answer not,
However we may call.
They throng the silence of the breast,
We see them as of yore,—
The kind, the true, the brave, the sweet,
Who walk with us no more.

'Tis hard to take the burden up
When these have laid it down.
They brightened all the joy of life,
They softened every frown.
But, oh! 'tis good to think of them
When we are troubled sore.
Thanks be to God that such have been,
Although they are no more!

More homelike seems the vast unknown
Since they have entered there.
To follow them were not so hard,
Wherever they may fare.
They cannot be where God is not,
On any sea or shore.
Whate'er betides, thy love abides,—
Our God forevermore!

RECORD IN THE OLD FAMILY BIBLE OF EBENEZER TAFT.

	BORN	DIED	AGE
EBENEZER TAFT	1758	Oct. 3, 1836	78
MARY (HOWARD) TAFT . .	Oct. 10, 1760	Aug. 15, 1848	88

CHILDREN.

	BORN	DIED	AGE
ENOS TAFT	Dec. 8, 1779	Dec. 29, 1813	34
BETSY TAFT	June 11, 1781	Sept. 21, 1814	33
PUTNAM TAFT	Aug. 5, 1783	Feb. 10, 1810	27
POLLY TAFT	June 20, 1785	August, 1865	80
SALLY TAFT	Oct. 21, 1788	March, 1855	66
CHLOE TAFT	Nov. 7, 1790	May 14, 1824	33
DEBORAH TAFT	Feb. 20, 1792	Feb. 14, 1814	22
LEONARD TAFT	June 17, 1794	Oct. 25, 1872	78
ELLIS TAFT	May 20, 1796	Aug. 15, 1851	55
PHILA TAFT	Jan. 30, 1799	Feb. 17, 1885	86
NANCY TAFT	Aug. 14, 1801	Jan. 14, 1849	47
MILLENS TAFT	Jan. 20, 1804	June 6, 1890	86

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